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PAGE 01 STATE 040009

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FOLLOWING CAIRO 1761 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO ALEXANDRIA AMMAN
DAMASCUS FEBRUARY 10; REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

S E C R E T CAIRO 1761

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EG, US, SY

SUBJECT: GOE CONCERN ABOUT AMERICAN OFFICIAL AND PRESS PROMINENCE
BEING GIVEN TO ASAD AND SYRIA

SUMMARY. SENIOR GOE OFFICIALS ARE QUIETLY COMPLAINING TO US
ABOUT WHAT THEY SEE AS SHIFTING USG AND US MEDIA EMPHASIS FROM
SADAT TO ASAD AS THE PRINCIPAL ARAB LEADER. THEY POINT TO US
PRAISE FOR SARG IN LEBANON, NEW MEDIA FOCUS ON ASAD AS ME
"SUPER STAR", AND LACK OF USG RESPONSE TO SYRIAN MEDIA ATTACKS
ON "DECEITFUL" USG POLICY. EGYPTIANS, PERENNIALY HYPERSENSITIVE
TO ANY CHALLENGE TO EGYPT'S PREMIER ROLE IN ARAB WORLD, ARE
PARTICULARLY PRICKLY NOW, HAVING CONCLUDED SARG INTERESTED NOT
IN PEACE, BUT IN MILKING POLITICAL AND PROPAGANDA GAIN FROM

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PAGE 02 STATE 040009

STALEMAT E IT HAS IMPOSED. FOR SADAT, USG-GOE RELATIONSHIP IS

CRUCIAL, BOTH AS ASSET IN INTER-ARAB RIVALRIES AND AS VITAL UNDERPINNING OF HIS FOREIGN POLICY. FEAR IS THIS RELATIONSHIP BEGINNING TO BE SUBTLY UNDERMINED. SOME PUBLIC AND PRIVATE GESTURES ON OUR PART SEEM INDICATED TO SOOTHE EGYPTIAN FEARS, SUSPICIONS, AND OUTRAGED PRIDE. END SUMMARY.

1. WE ARE BEGINNING TO GET RUMBLINGS FROM SENIOR GOE CIRCLES IN MFA (FAHMY AND HIS STAFF) AND PRESIDENCY (TAHSIN BASHIR, HAMDI TAHRI) ABOUT WHAT IS BEING READ HERE AS BOTH A USG OFFICIAL AND PUBLIC MEDIA SHIFT FROM SADAT TO ASAD AS PRINCIPAL ARAB LEADER. WITH SOME RESENTMENT, OUR INTERLOCUTORS POINT TO TWO ASPECTS OF CURRENT SITUATION, WHICH THEY INTERPRET AS SUPPORTING THEIR CASE.

A. FIRST, SINCE SYRIAN-SPONSORED UNSC DEBATE, AMERICA PRESS HAS BEGUN TO FOCUS ON ASAD IN ITS NEWS COVERAGE. AS RECENT TIME ARTICLE PUT IT, SYRIA HAS BECOME MIDDLE EAST QUOTE SUPER STAR UNQUOTE. AS IF THIS WERE NOT ENOUGH, USG OFFICIALS HAVE PUBLICLY APPLAUDED SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANESE PEACEMAKING PROCESS. EGYPTIANS, ON THEIR PART, HAVE HAD TO SIT ON SIDELINES AND DEEPLY RESENT SYRIAN SUCCESS IN LEBANON. WHILE PROFESSING TO WANT A SETTLEMENT IN LEBANON, THEY DENIGRATE SYRIAN ACHIEVEMENT AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY. IN SHORT, THEY VIEW APPARENT SYRIAN SUCCESS AS A BLOW TO EGYPTIAN POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN ARAB WORLD AND PRIVATELY GRUMBLE THAT SINAI II IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SITUATION IN WHICH GOE NOW FINDS ITSELF.

B. SECOND, EGYPTIANS NOTE USG HAS CHOSEN TO IGNORE RECENT SPATE OF SYRIAN PUBLIC MEDIA ATTACKS ON GOE AND USG. FOR EXAMPLE, DAMSCUS RADIO CHARGED FEW DAYS AGO THAT USG, GOE, AND ISRAEL ARE IN LEAGUE TO DECEIVE ARABS AND TO MAINTAIN ISRAEL AS BASE FOR US IMPERIALISM IN MIDDLE EAST (SEE FBIS REPORTS)

ANOTHER RECENT DAMASCUS RADIO BROADCAST ALLEGED EGYPTIAN REGIME KNEW SINAI II WOULD PROVIDE ISRAEL WITH TIME TO BIND ITS WOUNDS SO THAT USG COULD RETURN TO ITS QUOTE POLICY OF DECEPTION UNQUOTE BASED ON DESIRE DRIVE WEDGE INTO ARAB UNITY. DAMASCUS HAS BROADCAST THAT USG CONSIDERS ISRAELI QUOTE EXPANSION UNQUOTE AS METHOD TO SECRET

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PAGE 03 STATE 040009

CONSOLIDATE US INFLUENCE IN MIDDLE EAST. THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER SUCH RECENT ATTACKS HEARD BY EGYPTIANS. OUR INTERLOCUTORS PROFESS TO FIND IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND WHY USG DOES NOT PUBLICLY RESPOND TO SUCH SCURRIOUS CHARGES AND NOTE THAT IN ARAB WORLD SILENCE MEANS ASSENT.

2. SENIOR EGYPTIANS MAKE NO BONES ABOUT THEIR MISGIVINGS RE OUR CURRENT BENIGN POSTURE TOWARD ASAD AND THE SYRIANS.

WHILE THEY EARLIER WANTED SYRIA TO PARTICIPATE IN ME PEACE PROCESS, AND STILL DO IF SHE WISHES TO DO SO, THEY HAVE NOW CONCLUDED SARG HAS NO INTEREST IN FURTHERING PEACE PROCESS. INSTEAD, SARG OBJECTIVE IS TO MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL OUT OF STALEMATE IT HAS IMPOSED. SADAT HAS TOLD VISITORS IT IS NOW AN "EITHER OR" CONFLICT BETWEEN HIM AND ASAD. FAHMY HAS BEGUN TALKING ABOUT GOING TO GENEVA ALONE IF NEED BE. IN THIS HEATED ATMOSPHERE BROUGHT ABOUT LARGELY BY SYRIAN REACTION TO SINAI II, EGYPTIANS ARE CONCERNED THAT IN ARAB WORLD EYES USG APPEARS TO BE COZYING UP TO DAMASCUS TO PROBABLY DETRIMENT OF CAIRO'S POSITION AS THE CHIEF ARAB WORLD-WASHINGTON LINK ON ISRAELI PROBLEM. AS EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE IN ARAB WORLD IS SEEN TO DIMINISH (E.G. LEBANON), SADAT'S FOSTERING OF SPECIAL GOE-USG RELATIONSHIP IS ONE OF LAST TANGIBLE ASSETS HE POSSESSES SINCE, IN HIS VIEW, MOST ARABS AGREE THAT HIS BRINGING USG ACTIVELY INTO ME POLITICAL SCENE WAS AND IS DIPLOMATIC COUP. IF SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP SHOULD WANE BECAUSE OF ANY US ACTION (OR LACK THEREOF), SADAT WILL BE CAST BY SYRIAN, IRAQI AND OTHER ARAB CRITICS AS GULLIBLE SIMPLETON AT BEST OR, AT WORST, AS THE DECEITFUL US AGENT SYRIANS NOW SAY THAT HE IS (SEE REF FBIS).

3. EGYPTIANS KNOW WE HAVE REPEATEDLY STATED IN PAST TWO YEARS THAT USG REGARDS SADAT AS PRINCIPAL ARAB LEADER AND PROFESS TO SEE OUR CURRENT FOCUS ON SYRIANS AS INCONSISTENT WITH THAT OFTEN-STATED PURPOSE. THEY ARE POINTING TO THE OLD CANARD THAT ONE GETS MORE ATTENTION FROM USG FOR BEING DIFFICULT THAN FOR BEING COOPERATIVE.

4. WE ARE EMPHASIZING TO ALL SUCH INTERLOCUTORS THAT THEIR CONCERN IS TOTALLY UNFOUNDED. WE REMIND THEM THAT EGYPT HAS LONG BEEN REGARDED AS PRINCIPAL COUNTRY IN ARAB WORLD AND THAT USG SUPPORTS SADAT AND HIS POLICIES IN EVERY FEASIBLE WAY.

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SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 040009

SUBSTANTIAL US ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR EGYPT IS SIMPLY ONE EXAMPLE OF THAT SUPPORT. SO IS WARM RECEPTION SADAT RECEIVED WHEN APPEARING BEFORE CONGRESS AND ON ENTIRE US VISIT. WITHOUT SADAT'S COURAGE AND STATESMANSHIP, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO PEACE PROCESS. SAME TIME WE DO BELIEVE SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON HAS GENERALLY BEEN CONSTRUCTIVE, BUT THIS VIEW IS IN NO WAY INTENDED TO BELITTLE SADAT'S AND EGYPT'S IMPORTANCE. ALL FRIENDS OF LEBANON CAN ONLY WELCOME ANY SETTLEMENT WHICH CAN BE REACHED THERE. OUR CURRENT DISCUSSIONS WITH SYRIANS, AS OUR EGYPTIAN FRIENDS SHOULD KNOW, FOCUS PRIMARILY ON HOW TO GET THE PEACE PROCESS UNDERWAY ONCE AGAIN. WHILE USG IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR AMERICAN MEDIA COVERAGE, IT IS SIMPLY UNTURE TO SUGGEST USG CONSIDERS ASAD AS THE PRINCIPAL ARAB LEADER.

5. COMMENT: THERE IS CLEARLY A LIMIT TO HOW MUCH USG CAN OR SHOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT INFLATED EGYPTIAN SENSITIVITIES. FACT REMAINS, HOWEVER, THAT EGYPTIANS ARE HYPERSENSITIVE, AND WE SHOULD AT LEAST TRY TO UNDERSTAND. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE IS NOT ADEQUATE BALM FOR THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM; EGYPTIANS THROUGHOUT GOE YEARS FOR POLITICAL REASSURANCE.

6. FURTHER, WE SHOULD NOT UNDERESTIMATE EGYPTIAN SENSITIVITY ON SPECIFIC ISSUE OF OUR SEEMING TO BELIEVE ASAD HAS, FOR TIME BEING, MORE INFLUENCE IN ARAB WORLD THAN DOES SADAT. EGYPTIANS ARE PATHOLOGICAL ON THIS POINT, AND REGRETTABLY, READ THINGS INTO ACTS OF COMMISSION AND OMISSION THAT ARE NOT INTENDED. SHOULD WE APPEAR TO BE PAYING A POLITICAL PREMIUM TO SYRIANS FOR BAD BEHAVIOR, THIS WILL STRENGTHEN THOSE EGYPTIAN ELEMENTS WHO HAVE QUESTIONED SADAT'S POLICY OF LARGELY ACCOMMODATING HIMSELF TO OUR DESIRES. MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, SHOULD SADAT HIMSELF COME TO BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE CONCLUDED ASAD RATHER THAN HE IS PRINCIPAL ARAB LEADER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS, THE PRESIDENT'S SENSE OF HUMILIATION AND BITTERNESS WILL BE STRONG. HE MIGHT NOT EVEN MENTION IT TO HIS SUBORDINATES, BUT WE WILL FEEL IT IN VARIOUS WAYS. AS OF NOW, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THIS HAS YET HAPPENED, BUT WE SHOULD NOT TAKE SADAT'S CONTINUED ACCOMMODATION TO OUR DESIRES FOR GRANTED. SHOULD HE COME TO FEEL, RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, THAT WE ARE PUSHING ANOTHER ARAB LEADER, HIS INSTINCTS, BOTH AS A EGYPTIAN AND AS LEADER OF HIS NATION, COULD
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SECRET

PAGE 05 STATE 040009

PROMPT HIM TO TAKE ACTION TO REDRESS SUCH A SITUATION. THESE MIGHT NOT NECESSARILY BE HELPFUL TO OUR PURPOSES.

7. IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO NIP THESE EGYPTIAN MISGIVINGS IN THE BUD. HAND HOLDING IS IMPORTANT AT THIS JUNCTURE, WHEN SADAT AND FAHMY IN PARTICULAR ARE DEEPLY WORRIED THAT PEACE PROCESS IS IN INITIAL STAGE OF STAGNATION. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE CONTINUE TO KEEP SADAT AND FAHMY INFORMED OF OUR THINKING ON POSSIBLE ACTIONS IN ME AREA AND TO DO SO ON TIMELY BASIS. WE MUST SOMEHOW REDRESS SITUATION WHERE ISRAELIS APPEAR TO BE DOING ALL OF THE TALKING ABOUT WHAT THEY ALLEGE ARE OUR JOINT INTENTIONS. IT MIGHT ALSO BE USEFUL FOR DEPT. TO LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES IN NEAR FUTURE TO STRESS PUBLICLY USG APPRECIATION FOR IMPORTANCE OF EGYPT AND FOR SADAT'S CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN ME PEACE PROCESS. ANY SUCH PUBLIC DECLARATION WOULD BE EAGERLY SEIZED ON HERE AS REAFFIRMATION USG PRIZES ITS SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CAIRO AND INTENDS TO MAINTAIN IT, WHATEVER SYRIAN CLAIMS ON US MAY ARISE DUE TO DIPLOMATIC EXIGENCIES. EGYPTIANS CANNOT HEAR THEIR PRAISES SUNG ENOUGH. EILTS
UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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